

## **USDA COOPERATES WITH STATES TO HALT SPREAD OF RABIES**

(RIVERDALE, Md.) - Tennessee and Virginia officials will begin vaccine bait drops in their states on Tuesday, Aug. 10, to stop the westward spread of raccoon rabies. The raccoons will be vaccinated orally against the fatal disease. This program is coordinated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's wildlife services program, which will distribute more than 560,000 fishmeal baits across portions of northeastern Tennessee and southwest Virginia.

Approximately 208,000 vaccine-filled baits will be dispersed across seven counties in Tennessee and 354,000 baits will be distributed across eight counties in southwest Virginia. The majority of the ice cube-sized raccoon snacks laced with the rabies vaccine will be distributed by low-flying planes in forested and rural areas through mid-August, with dispersal by hand in Tennessee towns and in Virginia's populated areas.

The seven northeast Tennessee counties involved in the vaccination effort are: Grainger, Greene, Hamblen, Hancock, Hawkins, Sullivan and Washington. The bait distribution area includes eight Virginia counties: Buchanan, Dickenson, Lee, Russell, Scott, Tazewell, Washington and Wise.

Tennessee was free of raccoon rabies cases until last year, when it became the 20th state to document raccoon rabies. Raccoon rabies was first seen in northwest Virginia in 1978 and has spread throughout most of the Virginia since then.

People and pets cannot get rabies by coming into contact with the baits and are encouraged to leave the cubes undisturbed should they encounter them. People can help stop the spread of wildlife rabies by having their domestic animals and pets vaccinated against rabies and keeping the vaccinations up to date. Current rabies vaccinations are the best protection for your pets and domestic animals, should they come into contact with rabid wildlife.

A virus that attacks the brain causes raccoon rabies. By vaccinating raccoons against rabies, USDA and its state cooperators are working to significantly reduce the number of animals that can serve as reservoirs of the disease and infect other wildlife, domestic animals or humans. USDA currently works with 15 states to distribute oral rabies vaccine baits. They include: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia and West Virginia.

For additional information concerning the raccoon oral rabies vaccine program, please contact USDA's wildlife services toll-free at 1-866-4 USDA-WS (1-866-487-3297).

Note to Reporters: USDA news releases, program announcements and media advisories are available on the Internet. Go to the APHIS home page at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov> and click on the "News" button.